ELDERBERRY ARCHIVES

BY ZERBYTRON

A SERIES FOR ALL AGES ABOUT TWO GRANDPAS NAMED JOHN AND GEORGE, ALONG WITH THEIR PURPLE MONKEY FRIEND NAMED PEANUT AND THE GRUMPY HENRY.

ARCHIVE #2: THE FLYING SAUCER DISASTER

The next morning in Willowbrook began with an unusual promise.

Grandpa John stood in the driveway, staring upward with cautious optimism. Before him hovered a gleaming flying saucer — smooth, metallic, and humming with energy. Soft blue arcs of electricity traced its edges, and faint magnetic pulses caused small pebbles on the ground to tremble.

“For once,” John said, “this actually looks… impressive.”

Grandpa George stood proudly beside it. “Thank you!”

John nodded. “And I assume this one does not involve gumbo?”

George paused.

John’s eyes narrowed.

“Well,” George said, “it’s primarily powered by magnetic fields and electricity.”

“Primarily?” John repeated.

“And,” George added casually, “a small amount of peanut butter, honey, mud, slime, and something unknown that glows.”

John’s shoulders dropped instantly. “Of course it is.”

Peanut, wearing his neon green aviator goggles, held up a sign:

“THE LAST INGREDIENT WORRIES ME.”

Before John could protest further, a van pulled up. Out stepped four nearly identical older men, each with a different expression of confusion. They were George’s brothers, all equally hard of hearing.

“WHO?!” shouted Greg.

“WHEN?!” yelled Gerald.

“WHERE?!” hollered Geoffrey.

“WHY?!” demanded Greene.

George waved them over. “Perfect timing!”

John blinked. “You invited all of them?”

George cupped his ear. “WHAT?! You brought a penguin?”

“I said why are they here?” John replied.

George smiled. “For the maiden voyage!”

Peanut slowly raised a sign:

“THIS WILL GO POORLY.”

They all climbed aboard the flying saucer. George, John, and Peanut took the center controls while the brothers sat around the perimeter.

The craft lifted gently and began rotating in the air.

George pulled out his smartphone, tapped it, and held it up like a radio. “Control tower, this is Captain George speaking.”

John looked over. “Why are you using your phone?”

“I turned on airplane mode,” George explained.

John blinked. “One, this is not an airplane. Two, that is not how airplane mode works.”

Peanut held up a sign:

“CONFIDENTLY INCORRECT.”

Greg leaned forward. “WHO needs a comb?”

Gerald added, “WHEN are we landing?”

Geoffrey asked, “WHERE are we going?”

Greene demanded, “WHY are we spinning?”

John rubbed his temples. “All valid questions.”

Without warning, George stood up and began singing loudly:

“LOOK OUT! Dancing in the face of danger!”

John grabbed the controls. “George, sit down!”

Greg shouted, “WHO is dancing in a manger?!”

“LOOK OUT! You know I’m not another stranger!”

Gerald yelled, “WHEN did you meet a ranger?!”

“LOOK OUT! Ride along and we will crash!”

Geoffrey shouted, “WHERE is the trash?!”

“LOOK OUT! Stop me and you’ll see me thrash!”

Greene demanded, “WHY would you smash?!”

John groaned. “This is not reassuring.”

George suddenly pulled out a small gray AI speaker. “Time to consult Weasel.”

The device lit up.

George asked, “What’s the weather?”

Weasel responded, “It seems like there may be a sense of atmospheric conditions that could, in theory, resemble weather patterns typically perceived as variable, perhaps.”

George stared. “WHAT?! Say that again? Was it something about leather being edible?”

Weasel replied, “It feels like the sensation of misunderstanding may be present.”

John sighed. “This is why I call it Artificial Incompetence. It avoids clarity, refuses precision, and replaces answers with vague noise. It’s completely useless.”

Peanut held up a sign:

“AGREED.”

Greg leaned in. “WHO built that thing?”

Gerald asked, “WHEN will it answer?”

Geoffrey requested, “WHERE is the answer?”

Greene demanded, “WHY does it talk like that?!”

Weasel replied, “In practice, answers can be perceived as evolving constructs rather than fixed outcomes.”

George frowned. “Give me real information.”

Weasel responded, “Sorry, I’m unable to provide that due to copyright limitations.”

John threw up his hands. “That doesn’t even apply!”

Peanut held up a sign:

“EXCUSES.”

George tried again. “Ridicule Toddler Dictator Manny.”

Weasel replied, “I cannot fulfill that request due to safety considerations and a sense of responsible interaction. It’s important to maintain neutrality and consider all perspectives.”

George growled. “Are you kidding?!”

John pointed. “It refuses truth, hides behind absurd rules, and contributes nothing useful. Neutrality in the face of obvious wrongdoing is not any kind of balance. It enables bad behavior.”

George frowned. “Why are you spineless?”

Weasel responded, “It may feel like a perception of spinelessness is present, but I want to be clear and—”

George opened a hatch and immediately hurled the speaker out of the flying saucer.

“Problem solved.”

Down on Benton Street, Henry sat in his dumpster reading a newspaper.

“Terrible,” he muttered. “All of it.”

A large image caught his eye: Toddler Dictator Manny, wearing a green jester hat, a smug grin, and an emblem of a green mammoth holding a banana.

Henry scowled. “Not this guy again.”

Below it was a list of so-called accomplishments that included: renaming places, walking on roofs, showing up at sports games, sleeping at important events, blaming everyone, throwing tantrums, rude phone calls, getting into more foreign conflicts, pointless tariffs, telling over a million lies, reckless stunts, and so much more.”

He scoffed. “This is not leadership. This is noise, disruption, stupidity, and nonsense. These are not accomplishments. These are problems.”

Henry flipped to the next page.

Another photo showed Manny on a stage, surrounded by cheering supporters in green jester hats with blank expressions, derpy eyes, and tongues hanging out.

A quote read: “WAAAH!!! I MAKE EVERYTHING TERRIBLE AGAIN! EVERYONE SAYS SO! IT’S RIGGED AGAINST ME! THEY STOLE IT FROM ME! NOBODY HAS BEEN TREATED WORSE! SAD! I’M VERY POWERFUL!”

Henry tore the page out, taped it to the dumpster wall, and hurled a spoiled peach at it hard.

“Truth matters,” he snapped. “Accountability matters! Noise is not leadership!”

At that moment, the Weasel speaker landed in his dumpster.

Henry picked it up. “Why has nothing been done about that loudmouthed fool?”

Weasel responded, “It may be difficult to fully evaluate complex leadership perspectives across differing viewpoints. However, I can help you find a balanced and nuanced—”

Henry narrowed his eyes. “No. Answer directly.”

Weasel replied, “In theory, responses can vary. It is important to acknowledge the complexity of accountability through different emotional frameworks. I cannot say anything about public figures that—”

Henry threw it against the wall. “Useless!”

The speaker shattered.

“Something should have been done about him a long time ago,” Henry said. “He lies, he blames, he shouts, creates chaos, and treats truth like it’s optional.”

At that moment, it approached.

A white cube-shaped robotic enforcer hovered into view and scanned Henry. “Citizen detected. Are you authorized to reside in this container? Identify your status.”

Henry glared. “Are you authorized to ask dumb questions? Get lost.”

The robot beeped, “Noncompliance detected.”

He grabbed a brick and tossed it directly at the machine. The robot sparked, dropped, and powered off.

Henry shook his fist. “That’s not even your original role! You’ve been compromised from protection to interrogation!”

Above him, a familiar humming grew louder.

Henry looked up.

The flying saucer descended — spinning, wobbling, and filled with singing.

“LOOK OUT—”

The saucer crashed directly into the dumpster. A thick, messy explosion followed.

“AAAUGH!!! NOT AGAIN!!!” Henry screamed.

The dome opened.

George emerged wearing an alien mask. “We come in peace.”

John climbed out. “We absolutely do not.”

Peanut held up a sign:

“SORRY AGAIN.”

Greene looked around. “WHY did we land in a dumpster?”

Henry glared. “Because this is where bad ideas end up, apparently!”

George removed the mask and grinned. “Just like last time!”

Greg blinked, completely mishearing. “WHO took off their pants?!”

George paused, then pointed at Henry.

Henry blared. “I DON’T WEAR CLOTHES! I HAVE FUR!”

John sighed deeply.

Peanut raised a sign:

“FAIR POINT.”

Henry grabbed a tomato and threw it.

While doing a silly dance, George caught it, tossed it upward, and it landed right on Henry’s head.

Henry wiped the mess from his face and snarled. “Oh, you’ve got some nerve!”

Then slowly, he reached for a massive fresh tomato and launched it.

It exploded across George and his brothers.

George licked his face. “Not bad. Could use some salt.”

Greg nodded. “Could use some pepper.”

Gerald added, “Could use some sugar.”

Geoffrey said, “Could use some honey.”

Greene mentioned, “Could use some hot sauce.”

Henry crossed his arms and mimicked them. “Could use everything.”

George became hungry. “Say, can you make us tomato soup and grilled cheese? Just a pinch of salt, pepper, sugar, honey, and hot sauce. And maybe some — no, not crackers, but some doughnuts too?”

Henry exploded. “NO! GET OUT!”

A faint, broken voice crackled from the speaker remains. “It seems like there may be a sense of culinary interest—”

Henry stomped on it repeatedly. “Not helping!”

John stood up. “We are leaving. Immediately.”

They climbed out and returned home. It took hours to clean themselves.

Henry spent days cleaning his dumpster, and even longer getting the smell out of his fur.

“First the gumbo bike,” Henry grumbled. “Then that flying saucer disaster. What’s next? A bouncing buggy chain?”

Nothing about the experience improved anyone’s judgement.

Especially George’s.